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I

THE RUSSIANS OF THE SOVIET FAR EAST

Outwardly there is no great difference between the Russian Far East and the rest of the Soviet Russian Empire. The Communist Party seems to rule in Vladivostok and Khabarovsk as firmly as in Moscow and Leningrad. Nevertheless, the Russian Far East has an individuality of its own and has its special problems. Vladivostok lies as far away from Moscow as London does from Winnipeg, Capetown or Calcutta. Such a gigantic distance must have political consequences even in an autocratic or totalitarian state. In territories where Russia borders on China, Korea, Japan and the United States, the outlook of the local Russian inhabitants is bound to differ from that prevailing on the banks of the Don or the Volga. Geographical circumstances force the Russians of Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk or Khabarovsk to feel themselves 'Far Easterners' ('Dalnevostochniki'), pioneers who have a special political and historic mission, incomparably more complicated than the tasks confronting the population of Central or Western Russia.

In Czarist Russia it was generally understood that the Far East was a 'special case'. Until Russia suffered defeat in the war against Japan in 1905 she looked upon her Far East as a base for the conquest of wide Asiatic territories – Manchuria, Korea, China and Tibet. There seemed to be no limit to her imperialistic ambitions. Japan's victory completely changed this situation. Russian expansion in the Far East met with a serious setback, and many Russians even doubted whether Vladivostok and other Far Eastern possessions of the Czarist Empire could be held for any length of time. Russia, it is true, was connected with the Pacific coastal areas by the Trans-Siberian Railway, but there was widespread fear that this link might not prove solid enough. In 1909 the well-known liberal monthly journal of St. Petersburg, *Vestnik Evropy*, warned the government that the Russian Far East might act towards Russia in the same way as New England had acted towards the English crown. The separation of the Pacific possessions from the Russian Empire appeared as a real danger which could be averted only by a policy of concessions and economic privileges. The writer of the article in *Vestnik Evropy* reminded his readers that the revolt of Britain's former North American colonies occurred over a question of customs

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● 648 duties and that this should be a lesson to Russia in dealing with her distant Far Eastern colonies.[1] A democratic and liberal Russia might well have granted special rights to the Russian Far East and perpetuated the freedom of customs duties which the ports of Vladivostok and Nikolayevsk enjoyed at the beginning of the century.* The Russian Far East might have achieved, within the Russian Empire, something approaching a dominion status. The democratic régime which was ready to open Russia's windows into the world collapsed in 1917 after only a few months' existence. But even the Soviet régime, which succeeded it, could not escape from the geographical peculiarities of the Far East and from the special mentality of the Russian 'Far Easterners'.

I. THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

THE FAR EASTERN REPUBLIC

635 642 In the early years of Soviet rule the special communist approach towards the Russian Far East found expression in the establishment of the 'Far Eastern Republic' (F.E.R.). This buffer state was set up by a decision of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party. The Republic was to appeal to the patriotism and to the anti-Japanese animosities of the Far Eastern Russians, but not to their sympathies for an international communism. It was to have a 'bourgeois democratic character'. Its constitution did not include any provisions about the setting-up of Soviets, but provided for a National Assembly to be elected by universal direct and secret ballot. The national flag of the Republic was red and blue and its coat of arms discarded the communist symbols, hammer and sickle. Instead, it showed an anchor and a pickaxe crossed over a wheat-sheaf. There were no 'People's Commissars' in the Far Eastern Republic, only ministers, and there was no 'Red Army', only a 'Revolutionary People's Army'.

186 Although the F.E.R. was founded by the Kremlin for mere tactical reasons some of its leaders took it very seriously and they wanted to transform the Republic into a living political reality. They demanded that the F.E.R., which reached in the west as far as Lake Baikal, should extend its territory to the Yenisey River, and they also pleaded for greater independence from Moscow than the Bolshevik Central Committee was willing to grant. Some quarters of the F.E.R. even toyed with

* Complete freedom from customs duties existed in the Russian Far East between 1862 and 1888. In 1888 customs duties were introduced for sugar, matches and kerosene and after 1901 duty had to be paid on industrial articles but not on agricultural produce (except for flour) nor on capital goods. Only Sakhalin and Kamchatka remained exempt. To attract more settlers freedom from customs duties was restored in 1904, but was finally abolished again in 1909.

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even where the N.K.V.D.-M.V.D. has no direct economic power it is the decisive political force, above all, in border areas like the Maritime Territory of the Soviet Far East.

There are indications, however, that the police ministry has encountered certain difficulties among the Far Eastern Russians during the war and post-war period. Conditions were certainly favourable to a re-emergence of that Far Eastern regionalism which Soviet power has tried so hard to eliminate. The people of Vladivostok, in particular, must have felt once more that the natural destiny of their city was that of a window into the world. They saw the many American lend-lease shipments arriving in their harbour and were bound to draw certain conclusions about the desirability of international trade and Soviet-American co-operation. More than people in other parts of the Soviet Union must the Russian inhabitants of the Pacific coastal areas have resented the policy of rigid isolationism which the Soviet Government has pursued particularly since 1947.

This frame of mind of the 'Far Easterners' makes it understandable that the very existence of an American consulate in Vladivostok was a matter of concern to the Soviet Government. The building of the consulate was put under constant supervision and for long periods it was floodlit at night. In 1948, the Soviet Government used a flimsy pretext to demand from the United States that they should withdraw their consular personnel from the Pacific port. The measure had little importance for the Americans as the activities of the four American consular officials were extremely limited, but it had a certain symbolic significance. The closing down of the consulate was a way of telling the people of Vladivostok that their hopes of their city becoming a link between Russia and the West were once more doomed. Some years later the charge was made that the consulate had been the centre of a spy-ring. This accusation was first put forward in the short story *In a Seaside Town* ('V Primorskom Gorode') which the popular Soviet illustrated *Ogonyok* published in 1950. In the daily press the 'plot' was mentioned for the first time on February 8th, 1953, when *Izvestiya* wrote : 'In 1947, the organs of the state security service liquidated a spy-nest organized by the assistant naval attaché at the American consulate general of Vladivostok, Richard'. *Izvestiya* produced no further details nor any evidence to support its disclosure which it simply quoted from a book *The Secret Weapon of the Doomed*. This latter work had come out under the auspices of the Komsomol organization. The absurdity of the Vladivostok spy story does not preclude the possibility that many Russian Far Easterners in the late 'forties' and early 'fifties' were persecuted for pro-Western sentiments just as others had been victimized for alleged pro-Japanese leanings in the late 'thirties.'

The particular sensitiveness which the Soviet authorities have shown

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647 665 there as a punishment. People who were an embarrassment to the authorities, for one reason or another, were frequently sent to the Arctic regions as administrators and Party secretaries. Most cases of abuse of which such ill-suited administrators had been guilty in distant territories were hushed up, but occasionally they became public, as in the case of the Soviet Commander of the Wrangel Island,* which is part of the Chukcha National Area, and situated off its Arctic coast.

The commander, whose name was Semenchuk, had committed the most outrageous arbitrary acts against both Chukchi and Eskimos, the native population of the island. He and his assistant, Startsev, had caused the death of a number of natives, but the Wrangel Island scandal would probably not have come to light had they not also assassinated the local Russian doctor. The two Soviet administrators were brought to Moscow as defendants in a big trial in which Vyshinsky himself acted as prosecutor. A sixty-five page Vyshinsky speech contains an exhaustive description of the Semenchuk régime on Wrangel Island. Semenchuk's authoritarian idea of the role of a Soviet administrator in the land of the Chukchi and Eskimos was summarised in the following pronouncement which he had made. 'I am the GPU here; I am the court, I am the Public Prosecutor. I have the power of life and death.'

Semenchuk and Startsev were sentenced to death and executed in 1936, but it is still a mystery how the Soviet Government could entrust the strategically important Wrangel Island to an outright criminal. Semenchuk had been in prison for the theft of silver cutlery from the Soviet Embassy in Teheran shortly before being dispatched to the Far North.[3]

The case of Semenchuk and Startsev is obviously an extreme one. There is no reason to doubt that some of the administrators are ardent idealists, determined to improve living conditions and promote education among the local peoples. If we can believe the Secretary of the Department of Cadres of the Khabarovsk Territorial Committee of the Communist Party, there has been a better selection of administrators for the distant areas of the Far East since 1939. The secretary in question had promised in that year that Party posts in these territories would be given in future only to particularly trustworthy persons. He had said,

● 418 167 * Russian sovereignty over Wrangel Island was established only with some difficulty Both Canada and the United States had striven to attach the island which has an area of 2,700 square miles to their respective territories. The Canadians established their claim by wintering on the island from 1921. They reasserted it by hoisting the flag there in 1921, and in 1922 the Canadian Prime Minister solemnly proclaimed the annexation of the island in a statement before the Ottawa Parliament. The Soviet régime can rightly claim to have rescued Wrangel Island for Russia. In 1924 the crew of the Soviet gunboat 'Red October' took it over and expelled the only Canadian who lived there, together with a group of 'anti-Soviet' Eskimos, who, they asserted, were engaged in illegal hunting of fur animals. The Soviet authorities then brought their own colonists from the mainland, mostly Chukchi and Eskimos, with a few Russians.

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FAR EASTERN ABORIGINES AND SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

Destiny has placed the Far Eastern natives into politically and strategically important regions, the mouth of the Amur, the Russian islands of the North-west Pacific, and the territory bordering the Behring Strait. Consequently, the nationalities concerned can only too easily be dragged into the struggle of the big powers for the Pacific. In fact, they have already played their modest part in world politics, and may do so in future. The Nanai, Udege and Nivkhi have participated in Russian-Chinese rivalries. The Udege, Nanai and Ainu have stood between the lines in Russian-Japanese conflicts. The Chukchi, Aleuts and Asiatic Eskimos are involved in the American-Russian antagonism.

The Soviet régime has always been aware of the special position of the small Far Eastern nationalities, and has framed its propaganda accordingly. It has presented itself to the peoples concerned as their saviour rescuing them from 'Chinese merchant capitalism' or from 'Japanese militarism' or from 'American robbery'. The aim of Soviet 'native policy' in the Far East is thus to make the local nationalities anti-Chinese, anti-Japanese or anti-American, as the case may be, and to instil in them a feeling of gratitude towards Russia and the Russians.

Not everything which Russian propagandists tell the natives about other nations is necessarily untrue. It is a fact that Chinese merchants were, for a long time, almost sovereign rulers in the interior of the Russian Pacific province, and exerted a tyrannical overlordship over the aborigines. In some cases the aborigines were reduced to outright serfdom. But even Russian sources have had to admit that the Chinese were interested not merely in profits, but also in spreading their culture. In the absence of any major Russian cultural activities the Chinese ran schools for the aborigines. The latter studied Chinese history, and grew familiar with Chinese institutions. Russia and things Russian were either ignored altogether, or represented in a distorted light.[36] Some of the aborigines completely abandoned their mother tongue, and adopted the Chinese language. The Soviet régime brought about a complete change. It ended the economic exploitation of the natives by Chinese merchants and stopped Chinese cultural propaganda. Cultural domination passed into the hands of the Russians. From a Russian nationalist point of view this was undoubtedly a great success, but whether it is preferable for a Far Eastern people to accept Russian or Chinese civilization is a matter of opinion.

THE NANAI

The most important nationality which the Soviet régime has claimed to have rescued from the Chinese are the Nanai. They are the largest single

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167 All these bases were officially under the Moscow government. Khabarov, who was called to Moscow to give a report, received the title of Boyar. His successor, Stepanov, continued systematically the exploration and taking possession of the land so that by 1681 Russia, for all practical purposes, ruled not only the Amur but also the area around the lower course of the Sungari and Ussuri. The first voivode in Albasin /today: Khabarovsk?/ was Tolbusin. But the behavior of the Russians toward the natives was anything but wooing. Violence and extortions practiced on the natives aroused animosity and led to uprisings, and in the end to battles with the Chinese. As a consequence in the eighties of the seventeenth century all settlements in the entire region were destroyed and most of the Russians were killed. Even Albasin /today: Khabarovsk?/, which had developed into the center of Russian power in the Amur area by continually drawing people in, was captured and destroyed by Manchurian troops in 1684. However, after their withdrawal the Cossacks rebuilt the city and began anew to till their fields. The rapacious border warfare recommenced. Thereupon /25/ a Chinese army with 8,000 men and 40 guns appeared before Albasin /today: Khabarovsk?/ in 1687, while there were only 736 Russians within the city. The Russians, however, succeeded in withstanding all attacks even though at the end only 66 men remained. The others had been killed or had fallen victim to scurvy.

●[64R] In order to bring an end to these bloody and inexorable border fights, which had taken on the character of a mutual war of extermination, Russia and China resolved on a treaty which was laid down in Nerchinsk on September 7, 1689. The area west of the Argun was promised to Russia, and Russia pledged to withdraw all Russian settlers from the eastern side of the Argun to the western side. The river area of the real Amur was to remain in China's hands. A left Amur tributary, the Gorbitsa, was laid down as the western border, while the watershed between the Lena and the Amur was determined as the northern border: this watershed in the main runs along the ridge of Stanovoy. All Russian settlers in the Amur country had to leave; Albasin was razed and given up.

After the Nerchinsk Treaty the colonization of Transbaykal began. For the protection of the border the Transbaykal Cossack army was drawn up and settled in numerous stations on the Argun, where the Cossacks led an unconstrained border life--half peasant, half soldier. They soon got along well with the Buryat, who had set up

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484 conduct against the explorers recognized by the authorities, and he found support from the new Russian governor for East Siberia, Muraviev, who later was made a count and received the honorary name of Amurskii. Muraviev got him command of a small ship, with which Nevelskii headed for the Far East from Kronstadt and in 1849 began his explorations, even before he had received permission to do so. He determined that the connection to the north between the sea and the Amur Gulf could be traversed at all times by ocean-going vessels with a depth of up to 4 meters, and that Sakhalin was an island, and that accordingly during the warm seasons ocean-going vessels with a depth of up to 5.50 meters could get unhampered to the mouth of the Amur from the Sea of Japan through Tatarskiy Proliv /sound/. This news caused a sensation in Petersburg and awakened anew the greatest interest in the Far East both among the state leaders and among the public. In the meantime explorers such as Middendorff, among others, and later also Nevelskii himself reported that the area east of the Lesser Khingan and of the Ussuri had, for all practical purposes, never been brought under Chinese administration and that it was, therefore, in fact free. Thereupon Muraviev took possession of this area and also the Amur country. All of these events are reported in detail, but from the Chinese point of view, by Aitchen K. Wu in his work appearing in 1950, "China and the Soviet Union" (231).

231. Aitchen, K. Wu. China and the Soviet Union (London, 1950).

[648] In 1858 Russia and China signed the Treaty of Aigun, in which the Amur country was declared to be a Russian possession, while the Ussuri country was to be administered jointly by the two countries. But in 1860 in a treaty with Peking Russia also received the Ussuri country and was promised the Island of Sakhalin. With this, all regions which today belong to /27/ the Soviet Union came under Russian administration. In 1860 Vladivostok was founded, in whose name the imperative of Russia's Far Eastern policy was expressed: "Rule the East!"

General Survey

133 Transbaykal, like the other border areas in the Far East, belongs to the east Siberian mountain country. In contrast to the other

Chita. Until a few years ago there were only two sugar factories in Voroshilov (Ussuri-Khanka Area) to supply the sugar needs. The largest of the two could process up to 1,400 tons of sugar /180/ beets a day. In order to supply Chita Oblast and the Buryat-Mongol ASSR, the cultivation of sugar beets has been begun there since 1943, and a sugar factory has been built in Bichura in the Buryat-Mongol ASSR. Another such factory is supposed to be built in Chita. The extraction of plant oils is done primarily by two large oil mills in addition to numerous small installations which are part of agricultural establishments. One of these large oil mills is in Blagoveshchensk, where primarily sunflower seeds are processed; the second of these large oil mills is in Voroshilov. It specializes in the processing of soy beans and perilla seeds.

/181/ TRANSPORTATION

General Significance of the Transportation Situation

The pressure (to have access) to the sea was the real reason for the unrelenting march of the Russians to the Pacific. The unfavorable situation of the Sea of Okhotsk caused them to turn to the south, where the mouth of the Amur awakened hopes in them. With obstinate patience they endured one and a half centuries until this goal, too, was attained. Their hopes, however, were disappointed. Nikolayevsk at the mouth of the Amur did not prove itself to be a suitable harbor and open door to the Pacific. In Vladivostok a more favorable place and an excellent harbor was found, but it developed slowly because the immediate hinterland was still not developed and the route from Siberia through Russia's own territory via Khabarovsk was too far. Thus, by virtue of a treaty with China, the "Chinese East Railroad," as the Russians call the north Manchurian railroad, was laid as a straight line crossing through Manchuria, even before the Amur railroad was built. With this the way to Vladivostok was shortened by about 1,000 kilometers. The north Manchurian railroad was completed in 1904; the Amur railroad, on the other hand, was completed only in 1916. The harbor in Vladivostok, however, is closed by ice for an average of 110 days, and during this period must be kept open by ice-breakers. So the glance of the Russians shifted to the south and rested in the harbor of Dal'nyy, "the far away," which was later renamed Dairen by the Japanese. From Harbin the Russians laid a railroad to Dal'nyy and laid out Port Arthur to protect the naval port. The route from Harbin

489 to Dal'nyy was, to be sure, 325 kilometers longer than the route to
648 Vladivostok, but the ice barrier in Dal'nyy was scarcely noticeable, and a second access to the Pacific was attained. In the Russo-Japanese War, to be sure, this southern position was lost, and in 1935 the north Manchurian railroad, too, was lost through forced sale. However, the outcome of World War II brought all these positions again into the hands of the Soviet Union, who restored the earlier situation by new treaties, and who thereby shows that she will pursue again the old path of the Czars. And the day is no longer far off when a railroad will lead from Ulan-Ude in Transbaykal via Ulan Bator (Urga) to Peking and Tientsin. As she did in the case of the Manchurian route, the Soviet Union can, on the basis of treaties, create another way out, which, going from Ulan-Ude directly to the sea, is more than 500 kilometers shorter than the route to Vladivostok. Only the middle piece is still missing.

648 /182/ As a result of this transportation situation, the Soviet Union exercises extensive influence on the neighboring regions. When the north Manchurian railroad was built from 1897 to 1904, northern Manchuria was extremely lightly populated. Harbin, at that time a small fishing village, already had a population of 470,000 by 1938. With the growing settlement of the land the influence of the Russians also grew, working through the railroad lines which were the nerve centers of life and of the economy. The influence of the Russians was especially great in northern Manchuria which was principally settled after the construction of the railroad; and even the Japanese were not able to eliminate this influence in the period from 1931 to 1945. It can be assumed to be obvious that this influence will begin to grow anew since the main economic channels again have received Russian blood. In this growth of influence, the limits are not in sight. In this the fact that Manchuria is surrounded geographically in the east by the Ussuri county, which in Vladivostok has the closest world harbor for northern Manchuria, is of just as great significance as the fact that northern Manchuria is surrounded on the west by the Mongolian People's Republic. And here Transbaykal plays a particular role. It represents not only a natural continuation of the Mongolian landscape; but also the Buryat Mongols are the closest relatives of the Khalkha Mongols, and, under Russian and Soviet Russian rule, the Buryat Mongols culturally and economically have attained a great jump ahead of their brothers on the other side of the border. From this an influence which will have an effect over the border can be explained as perfectly natural,

without any additional reasons. It must also be assumed as obvious that Buryat-Mongol relationships in the Soviet Union served as a model in the formation of the Mongolian People's Republic and its organization into a state, and also that thereby the influence of the Soviet Union has grown far beyond its political borders.

Land Transportation

Transportation acquires a striking importance with the size of the area. The development has shown that the transportation installations were not created because there was a necessity based on the economy of the region itself, but rather that the transportation-political standpoint of the entire state was decisive for the various transportation installations. The Amur railroad and also the Ussuri railroad were for their part built through regions which were often completely uninhabited or settled only extremely slightly. Only with the construction and after the completion of these railroad lines did people stream in in larger numbers, and accordingly the railroads became pacemakers for the colonization and development of the economy. Even today it is still so. Connection with the transportation system is the necessary condition for winning new settlement areas and for exploiting the rich natural resources of this vast land.

With the slight density of population, transportation installations, such as for example the railroads, which required a great expenditure of capital and labor, often /183/ prove themselves to be unsupportable economically, unless these installations correspond to another, higher point of view, or are built for the future in a far-sighted fashion. In both cases it is up to the power and the enterprising spirit of a great state organism to carry out mighty tasks of this type. That was the case with the old Russia and it is also the case with the Soviet Union. At any rate the slightness of the railroad network goes back to these reasons. In contrast to these, however, the transportation installations, whose introduction required only slight outlays of money, are much better developed. To this category belongs water transportation, whose present state, according to the judgment of Soviet specialists, exceeds even that of the European part of the USSR. Also in this category is air transportation.

The railroads are the main bearers of the traffic. The eastern part of the Trans-Siberian Railroad constitutes the main vein. It runs from Lake Baykal via Ulan-Ude and Chita across Transbaykal, and then,

these the wood industry should be mentioned in first place. It is concentrated above all in Shkotovo (approximately 10,000 inhabitants) and Tigrovka (approximately 5,000 inhabitants), both of which lie on the railroad line to Suchan. The wood industry is also concentrated in Okeanskaya (approximately 2,300 /277/ inhabitants) to the north of Vladivostok, where a large wood factory delivers veneer wood for export.

The industry in Vladivostok, like industry generally in the southern Ussuri country, is based on coal, which is on hand here in rich measure. Besides the various smaller coal mining localities, Artem and Suchan should be mentioned here as the principal localities producing coal. Already by 1938 the coal mined in Artem exceeded that mined in Suchan by threefold, and since then coal mining in Artem has been very much further increased. To Artem belong also the two coal districts, Ugol'naya and Trudovaya. The new railroad line, which leads along the western coast of the Bay of Peter the Great to Pos'yet and Kraskino, connects the most important coastal localities, which above all pursue the catching of fish. In the same region there are some sovkhoz for breeding stags at Peschanaya, in Krabbe, and on the Gamova Peninsula.

Sakhalin Island

Sakhalin came to Russia through the treaties of Aigun (1858) and of Peking (1860). However, until 1871 Russia had to share possession of the island with Japan, which in early times had already erected numerous factories in the southern part of the island. Through the unhappy Russo-Japanese War, Russia lost the southern half of the island to Japan. The fiftieth latitude was determined as the boundary line. The outcome of World War II brought the Soviet Union again in possession of the entire island.

Sakhalin covers 80,000 square kilometers and stretches from north to south in an almost meridional direction for about 1,000 kilometers. Once feared as a prisoners' colony of the Czarist empire, the island is notorious for its raw climate. The famous Russian writer A. Chekhov writes, "Sakhalin has no climate at all; the weather is eternally bad and gloomy." The island owes this unhappy reputation to the influence of the cool Sea of Okhotsk, to which the bulk of the island is fully given over. The greatest part of the island is covered with thick forests, which recall the taiga of Siberia. Along the coast